The Blues
First, what is “Genre”?

Absolute?
Grey areas?
Changing?
What purpose?
Historically
Blues

• Very important to North American popular music history
  – Influenced all genres, especially rock and roll

• Blues as we know it, stated after 1865
  – What is the significance of this date?

• Not recorded until 1920s, so there are many unknown aspects about the music
• Old saying “Having the blues”

• May come from “blue devils,” a term from Elizabethan England

• c. 1900, “Blues” used to describe a wide variety of music, not just what we think of as blues music
Delta Blues

- Earliest form of blues
- Geographic origins of name
- Mississippi plantations
The State of Mississippi
Delta Blues

• Often solo performers, usually men
  – Largely due to gender roles of the day
• Acoustic guitar, sometimes banjo, mandolin
• Piano?
• Itinerant performers
  – Travelling around from plantation to plantation, and town to town
Robert Johnson (1911-1938)

- b. Hazlehurst, Mississippi
- One of the most well known delta blues singers
- Influence
- Crossroads legend, death

Ex: Robert Johnson
- “Me and the Devil Blues” (1937)
- see lyrics
Robert Johnson (1911-1938)

• “Who’s the other guitar player?” (Keith Richards)
• Thumb and finger style (guitar demo)

Ex: Robert Johnson – “Sweet Home Chicago” (1936)
• see lyrics

• Only 2 recording sessions:
• 1936 San Antonio, Texas hotel room
• 1937 Dallas, Texas, makeshift studio
12 Bar Blues Form

• *Beats* and *bars* as measures of musical time.
• What is a *chord*
• What do we mean by *chord changes* (a.k.a. *harmony*).
# 12 Bar Blues Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bar</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chords</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Turnaround</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyrics</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar</td>
<td></td>
<td>Response</td>
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<td>Response</td>
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<td>Response</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Charley Patton

- Unknown birth year: 1881 (or 85 or 87)-1934
- B. Hinds County, Mississippi
- Hugely influential to other Delta blues musicians including Robert Johnson, Howlin’ Wolf, John Lee Hooker
- Mississippi cotton plantation
- Illiterate
- Mixed race (poss. Cherokee)
Charley Patton

Ex: Charley Patton – “A Spoonful Blues” (1929)

- What is he using to play the guitar?
- Religious father hated guitar
- Blues/Church dichotomy
Lead Belly

- Huddie Ledbetter (1888-1949), b. Mooringsport, Louisiana
- Angola Prison farm, Louisiana
- Release
- Songster
- name

Ex: Lead Belly
- “Midnight Special” (1934)
- See lyrics
Lead Belly

- King of the 12-string guitar
- NYC
- Songs recorded by Bob Dylan, Led Zeppelin, Nirvana, White Stripes, etc.
John and Alan Lomax

• Father and son musicologist and folklorist team
• Song collectors
• Library of Congress
• Field recordings, started 1933
• Styles
• “portable” recording device
• Possible exploitation of artists
Muddy Waters

• McKinley Morganfield
• b. Issaquena County, Mississippi
• 1913-1983

• First recorded by John and Alan Lomax, 1941

Ex: Muddy Waters – “I Be’s Troubled” (1942)
• Later re-recorded in Chicago

• Moved to Chicago 1943, more later
The Great Migration

• Post-Civil War: explain Sharecropping

• 6 million African Americans, 1910-1970, mostly after the Depression

• Train routes (see map next slide)
Train routes
Northern Cities

- Chicago, Detroit, New York
  - To a lesser extent Pittsburg, Cleveland

- 24 hour factories
- Higher wages and standard of living
- Less racism
  - But still very much a part of daily life

- Chicago: All hours blues clubs
Chicago Blues

- After the Great Migration to northern cities, a new electric blues style emerged, known as Chicago blues

- Delta vs. Chicago

- Amplification (guitar, harmonica)
- Drums
- Volume
Muddy Waters

• Ex: Muddy Waters
  – “I Can’t Be Satisfied” (1948)

• Chess Records
• Compare to acoustic version
  – What is Muddy using on his guitar?
• Recognize the form?
Chess Records

• Most important Chicago blues record label/studio
• Leonard and Phil Chess
  – Polish, Jewish
• Role of Willie Dixon
• Influence back in the Delta
Ex: Muddy Waters – “I Just Want to Make Love to You” (1954)

- Hyper-masculinity

**Classic Chess sound:**
- Muddy (vocals and guitar)
- Little Walter (Harmonica)
- Otis Spann (Piano)
- Jimmy Rogers (Guitar)
- Willie Dixon (Bass)
- Elgin Evans (Drums)
Howlin’ Wolf

- Chester Arthur Burnett
- 1910-1976
- b. White Station, Mississippi

- Learned guitar from Charley Patton
- The other major Chess performer
Howlin’ Wolf

• 1951 recorded at Memphis Recording Service with Sam Phillips
• Songs licensed by Chess
• 1952 moved to Chicago

Ex: Howlin’ Wolf – “Smokestack Lightnin’” (1956)
Muddy/Wolf Rivalry
Little Walter

• 1930-1968, b. Louisiana
• Harmonica player (harp)
• Amplification creates new sound: distortion
• Recorded and toured with Muddy
• Only harmonica player in the Rock n Roll Hall of Fame

Ex: Little Walter
    – “Juke” (1952)